

# YEMEN AT THE UN

May 2018 Review







## YEMEN AT THE UN

*Yemen at the UN is a monthly series produced by the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies. It aims to identify UN-led efforts to resolve the conflict in Yemen and contextualize these efforts relative to political, security, economic and humanitarian developments on the ground.*

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**The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies** is an independent think-tank that seeks to foster change through knowledge production with a focus on Yemen and the surrounding region. The Center's publications and programs, offered in both Arabic and English, cover political, social, economic and security related developments, aiming to impact policy locally, regionally, and internationally.

Founded in 2014, the Sana'a Center is one of the few independent research centers that continues to operate in Yemen. While the Center maintains cordial relations with all key stakeholders it has remained fiercely unaligned with any of the belligerent parties. The Sana'a Center has thus maintained a unique positioning and ability to work throughout Yemen and beyond, distinguishing itself as an emerging leader in Yemen-related research and analysis.

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## Executive Summary

In May, Houthi forces were clearly on the defensive across most of Yemen, in particular losing ground in Hudaydah governorate as various anti-Houthi groups, backed by Emirati airpower, advanced on Hudaydah city. A Saudi-led coalition plan for a military offensive on the city last year was derailed due to a lack of US support and international outcry over the likelihood of massive humanitarian fallout. Last month, however, a Western official confirmed to the Sana'a Center that Washington and London had given the green light for the current offensive to take Hudaydah city, but with the caveat that the ports were not to be attacked (see 'Coalition-Backed Forces Advancing on Hudaydah Port' and 'Anti-Houthi Forces Make Gains in Taiz').

On May 8, United States President Donald Trump withdrew from the Iran nuclear agreement. Through the rest of the month, his administration significantly increased its bellicose rhetoric towards, and imposed punitive financial sanctions against, Tehran, often citing Iran's supposed military support of Yemen's Houthis as among the justifications (see 'Washington Exits 'Iran Deal' and Escalates Tensions With Tehran'). Meanwhile in Europe, it became public that since February the United Kingdom, France and Germany – all co-signatories to the Iran deal – have been pursuing talks with Tehran to help end the Yemen war, with all sides reporting progress (see 'EU Countries in Negotiations With Iran to End Yemen Conflict').

Media reports last month revealed that US military personnel were playing a more direct and extensive role in the Yemen conflict than the Pentagon had previously admitted, while a high-level Yemeni government official also confirmed to the Sana'a Center that the US was deploying military drones in direct support of anti-Houthi ground operations (see 'US Special Forces and Military Drones Active in Anti-Houthi Operations'). Simultaneously in Washington, lawmakers in both houses of the US Congress were pursuing legislation to increase transparency and controls on US involvement in the Yemen war (see 'Congress Scrutinizes US Role in Yemen Conflict and Detainee Torture').

Through the first half of May, the internationally recognized Yemeni government and Abu Dhabi traded barbs in public over the latter's move to land troops on Socotra island and seize control of the airport and marine terminal. Yemeni Prime Minister Ahmed Obaid bin Dagher called it "an assault on Yemen's sovereignty," while the United Arab Emirates blamed the Muslim Brotherhood for launching a smear campaign against it. By mid-month, Saudi intervention had helped de-escalate the confrontation (see 'UAE-Yemeni Government Standoff Over Socotra Island').

In the second half of May, Socotra and parts of eastern Yemen were then hit by two cyclones, with coalition partners heeding subsequent Yemeni government appeals for the rapid deployment of humanitarian aid to assist the affected populations (see 'Two Cyclones Flood Socotra').

In economic developments, President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi's March decision to liberalize fuel imports again led to market instability as a three-day fuel crisis gripped Aden (see 'Fuel Crisis in Aden'). Meanwhile in Sana'a, the CEOs of the country's largest banks gathered for a meeting, organized by the Sana'a Center at the Yemen Banks Association, seeking to address the country's financial challenges (see 'High-Level Banking Sector Meeting in Sana'a').

Also in Sana'a last month, the Saudi-led military coalition bombed the Presidential Office, located in a densely populated area with several schools nearby. The office was occupied by a full staff of civilian personnel at the time. At least six people were killed and 30 injured. A Senior Houthi official, in the building's basement at the time of the strike, was unharmed (see 'Coalition Bombs Presidential Office in Sana'a').

In an effort to head off the resurgence of cholera with the start of Yemen's rainy season, the World Health Organization, the UN Children's Fund and Yemen's national health authorities launched a mass cholera vaccination campaign last month (see 'Cholera Vaccination Campaign').

Also in May, high-level sources in both the Yemeni government and the Houthi leadership confirmed to the Sana'a Center that negotiations were underway for a large-scale prisoner exchange expected to take place at the end of Ramadan (see 'Prisoner Exchange Slate for Eid').



# INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMATIC DEVELOPMENTS

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## At the United Nations

### *At the UN Security Council*

In May, there were no UN Security Council (UNSC) briefings or consultations on the situation in Yemen. The Government of Yemen's Permanent Representative to the UN as well as his Emirati counterpart, however, each submitted a letter to the UNSC President regarding tensions on Yemen's Socotra Island (see below 'UAE-Yemeni Government Standoff Over Socotra').

## In the United States

### *Washington Exits 'Iran Deal' and Escalates Tensions With Tehran*

On May 8, President Donald Trump officially withdrew the US from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPA), widely known as the 'Iran deal'. Through the deal, Washington and other world powers had agreed to ease economic sanctions against Iran in exchange for Tehran curbing its uranium enrichment program and allowing international inspections of its nuclear facilities. Trump's move will reinstate US financial sanctions within 180 days. However, the other signatories to the agreement – the UK, France, Germany, Russia, China and the European Union – have all indicated their intent to try and preserve the agreement, despite US threats to sanction foreign companies doing business with Iran.

The day following Trump's announcement, the Yemeni government issued a statement endorsing the US withdrawal from the Iran deal. Issued by Yemen's foreign ministry, it stated that the move was "a big step in the right direction to prevent Iran's destabilizing and dangerous behavior," adding that "the deal failed to protect the vital interests of not only the US but also its partners and allies in the Middle East, including Yemen." According to a high level official within the Yemeni government who spoke with the Sana'a Center, US Secretary of State Pompeo called Yemeni President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi beforehand to seek the endorsement; the latter had agreed in exchange for a US administration statement acknowledging Yemeni sovereignty over Socotra amid tensions between the Yemeni government and the United Arab Emirates over the island (see below 'UAE-Yemeni Government Standoff Over Socotra Island').

Speaking to CNN on May 13, White House National Security Adviser John Bolton justified the move by saying that through the deal Iran was able "to advance its interests all across the Middle East, in Iraq, in Syria, in Lebanon, in Yemen."

On May 21, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo then delivered a speech to the conservative Heritage Foundation, laying out the administration's new Iran strategy. This amounted to 12 demands to which Pompeo said Iran must comply. These ranged from ordering that Tehran "never pursue plutonium reprocessing," end "its threatening behavior against its neighbors," and end support for many of its allies around the Middle East. The latter included the demand that Tehran end military support for the Houthis in Yemen. While stopping short of advocating for military action, Pompeo said the US would use its full economic might to force Iran to comply, while threatening to "track down" and "crush" Iranian operatives and proxies worldwide.

Between Trump announcing his withdrawal from the Iran deal and the end of May, the US treasury also announced multiple rounds of new sanctions against Iranian entities and associated individuals.

### ***Congress Scrutinizes US Role in Yemen Conflict and Detainee Torture***

On May 22, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee passed legislation that its proponents say is intended to bring the Yemen war to an end, protect civilians, and address the country's humanitarian crisis. The bipartisan bill, introduced in April by Senators Todd Young (R-Ind), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Susan Collins (R-Maine) and Chris Coons (D-Del), passed by a committee vote of 14 to 7.

The legislation mandates that the US Secretary of State certify, within 30 days of the bill becoming law, that Riyadh is actively seeking to end the war, increase food, fuel and medical access for Yemenis, reduce delays for humanitarian shipments, and lower the risk of civilians being harmed. Should this certification not be made, the legislation would ban the US from providing inflight refueling to Saudi-led military coalition aircraft participating in the Yemen conflict, except in limited circumstances. While the legislation has a national security waiver attached that the White House could use to continue the refueling, such action would require the administration to explain why the certification was not made and what steps are being taken to make Riyadh comply.

To become law, the legislation needs to pass a full Senate vote, a House vote, and be signed into law by the President.

On May 24, the US House of Representatives then unanimously passed an amendment to a Department of Defense (DoD) spending bill that would require the DoD to investigate whether members of the Saudi-led military coalition have been torturing detainees in Yemen and whether US personnel were involved. The determination of such would have legal implications for the US parties involved, while foreign units found to have committed gross human rights violations would become ineligible for US training, aid, and other assistance.

Within the past year, investigations by Human Rights Watch, the Associated Press (AP) and the UN Panel of Experts have all documented detainee torture by UAE-affiliated forces in southern Yemen. The AP report also asserted that US personnel



participated in the interrogation of the tortured detainees. The House amendment also comes following the confirmation of Gina Haspel as the new head of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) on May 17. In 2002, Haspel oversaw a US CIA detention site in Thailand where a suspected al-Qaeda member – thought to have been the mastermind behind the bombing of the USS Cole off the coast of Aden in October 2000 – was repeatedly tortured as part of his interrogation.

For the amendment to become law, similar language would have to be adopted by the Senate’s version of the DoD bill, and then survive reconciliation between the House and Senate versions.

### *Other US Developments in Brief*

- **April 30:** The US military issued a notice that it was seeking specialized contractors to supply emergency medical evacuations services for special operations personnel, “primarily within Yemen.” The draft performance work statement included specifications for both fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft, which needed to be able to carry out operations at a range of 500 and 400 nautical miles, respectively, and be capable of night vision goggle operations.
- **May 3:** The New York Times reported that US special forces personnel had been secretly deployed along the Saudi border with Yemen to assist the Saudi military in locating and destroying Houthi missiles and launch sites (see ‘Military and Security Developments’ below for details).
- **May 11:** The Intercept reported that the US State Department was taking preliminary steps toward a multibillion-dollar sale of “smart bombs” to Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. The deal is reported to involve “tens of thousands of precision-guided munitions” from the US-based weapons manufacturer Raytheon.
- **May 14:** President Trump renewed an executive order that former President Barack Obama had authorized on May 16, 2012, allowing for the implementation of US financial sanctions against individuals “that directly or indirectly threaten the peace, security, or stability of Yemen.” Executive Order 13611 stated that “these actions constitute an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States, and I hereby declare a national emergency to deal with that threat.”
- **May 18:** United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met the UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths in Washington, DC. According to a State Department spokesperson, the two agreed on the “urgency of de-escalation and dialogue” and jointly expressed “hope that all sides can work toward a comprehensive political agreement that brings peace, prosperity, and security to Yemen.”
- **May 22:** The US Treasury designated five Iranians it accused of having provided the Houthis with technical expertise related to ballistic missile launches against Saudi Arabia.

## Other International Diplomatic Developments

### *EU Countries in Negotiations With Iran to End Yemen Conflict*

On May 29, Reuters reported that talks between Iran, the UK, France and Germany regarding the Yemen conflict had been underway since February, with both Iranian and European officials saying progress was being made and that Tehran was prepared to use its influence to try and bring the warring parties to the negotiating table. The Reuters report is consistent with statements that government officials in various European capitals made during discussions with the Sana'a Center in May, in which they described their Iranian counterparts as expressing a willingness to facilitate talks with the Houthis.

The talks regarding Yemen are being held in parallel to discussions over the future of the Iran nuclear deal and were initiated in the runup to President Trump's decision to pull the US out of the JCPO (see above 'Washington Exits 'Iran Deal' and Escalates Tensions With Tehran'). The initial intent was to address Washington's concern regarding Iran's regional role and to showcase Europe's ability to mediate with Tehran.

### *Other International Developments in Brief*

- **May 4:** The British Court of Appeal decided to hear a plea filed by the Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT). CAAT aims to stop the UK government from licensing British arms sales to Saudi Arabia, citing numerous reports of human rights violations and war crimes committed by the Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen. The first ruling in the case was brought down by the high court in July 2017, when the court decreed that the UK government's arms export licenses to coalition states were lawful.
- **May 10:** Mahathir bin Mohammed, an outspoken critic of the coalition's military campaign in Yemen, became the new Malaysian Prime Minister. The day before, his party alliance had won a majority in parliamentary elections, ousting the party of former Prime Minister Najib Razak, seen as an ally of Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.
- **May 22:** French President Emmanuel Macron and Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman agreed that a joint humanitarian conference on Yemen would be held in Paris in late June, according to Elysée Palace. Macron announced the plan to organize the conference in a joint press conference with Muhammad bin Salman upon the latter's visit to Paris in early April. The conference is now scheduled for June 27, according to a French government official who spoke with the Sana'a Center.
- **May 23:** At a meeting with Saudi Arabia's Assistant Minister of Defense Mohamed Abdullah al-Aish, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir announced that his country's current economic woes would not dissuade it from "playing its Arab role in restoring legitimacy in Yemen, given that Sudan's declared principle is to defend the land of the two holy mosques."

## DEVELOPMENTS IN YEMEN

### Political Developments

#### *UAE-Yemeni Government Standoff Over Socotra Island*

At the beginning of May, UAE aircraft transported military vehicles, equipment and some 100 troops to Yemen's Indian Ocean island of Socotra, subsequently taking control of both the airport and marine terminal. Socotra is the largest landmass of the four-island Socotra Archipelago, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site owing to its biodiversity and populations of rare and endangered species. It also sits at the strategic intersection of shipping lanes between the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and the rest of the Indian Ocean.

On May 3, photographs geolocated to Socotra airport circulated on social media, showed C-17 military transport aircraft unloading BMP-3 infantry fighting vehicles and military trucks. The news agency AFP reported that the deployment had occurred without the prior knowledge of President Hadi, while also coinciding with a visit to the island by Prime Minister Ahmed Obaid bin Dagher, who on May 5 called the UAE actions "an assault on Yemen's sovereignty" and refused to leave until the crisis was resolved. The following day, the UAE's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MoFAIC) denounced bin Dagher's statement, saying that Abu Dhabi is "playing a balanced role" in promoting peace, stability and development on Socotra, and that it was "fully aware of the role played by Muslim Brotherhood in instigating such malignant media campaigns against the UAE."

While throughout the conflict there have been tensions between UAE-backed forces in Yemen and the internationally recognized Yemeni government, this incident marked the first time that Hadi officials and Abu Dhabi openly exchanged direct accusations against each other, putting on public display the rifts between the ostensible allies.

The UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC) followed the MoFAIC statement with one of its own, calling the Hadi government's accusations "fabrications" and also claiming that the Muslim Brotherhood was to be blamed for the crisis.

Yemen's Ambassador to the UN Khaled al-Yamani said in a May 8 letter (S/2018/440) to the UNSC that the UAE had undertaken "unjustified military action" that reflected the general disagreement between the Yemeni government and Abu Dhabi over national sovereignty. The letter concluded that "the continuation of the misunderstanding and its spread over all the liberated governorates, including the island of Socotra, is clearly damaging and can no longer be concealed, and that its impact has spread to all military and civilian institutions and negatively impacted local public opinion."

On May 9, the US also weighed in on the situation, with the State Department issuing a statement, saying "[p]olitical dialogue is necessary for the Republic of Yemen Government to rightfully ensure the safety and security of its residents on Socotra." According to a high level official within the Yemeni government who spoke with the Sana'a Center, Washington's statement was secured via a direct conversation between

US Secretary of State Pompeo and President Hadi; the former having called the latter to seek a Yemeni government statement endorsing President Trump's decision to exit the Iran deal (see above 'Washington Exits 'Iran Deal' and Escalates Tensions With Tehran'). President Hadi agreed in exchange for the US statement acknowledging Yemeni government sovereignty over Socotra.

Meanwhile, widespread discontent with the Emirati presence led to public protests in Socotra's capital, Hadibu, with the island's social media users posting under the Twitter hashtag "Socotra will not become the UAE's eighth emirate." Through the second week of May, however, Saudi mediation efforts appeared to gain traction; on May 14, Prime Minister bin Dagher declared in a Facebook post that the crisis was over, spoke about the enduring "brotherhood" between Yemenis, Emiratis and Saudis, and called for the coalition to refocus back on the primary enemies, the Houthis and Iran. Facilitated by the presence of Saudi mediators and a small contingent of troops, the UAE began to withdraw the troops it had deployed to Socotra and relinquished control of the island's air and sea ports.

In a May 21 letter (S/2018/490) to the UNSC, the UAE's Permanent Representative to the UN Lana Nusseibeh said that her government regretted the misunderstanding and reiterated Abu Dhabi's past humanitarian and development support for Socotra. "The situation in Socotra Island has now been fully resolved" she stated in the letter, adding that the UAE "unconditionally recognizes Yemen's sovereignty over Socotra Island."

### ***Hadi Appoints Khaled al-Yamani as Foreign Minister***

The Yemeni state news agency SABA reported on May 24 that President Hadi had appointed Khaled al-Yamani as his new foreign minister, replacing Abdel-Malek al-Mekhlafi. Al-Yamani is generally seen as a technocrat deeply loyal to the president.

Al-Yamani had been Yemen's Permanent Representative to the UN until his new appointment, and will be replaced in his former post by Ahmed Awadh bin Mubarak. In a highly unconventional move, bin Mubarak will become Yemen's UN representative while also maintaining his prior post as Yemen's Ambassador to the US.

### ***Other Political Developments in Brief:***

- **May 2:** A coalition claiming to represent roughly a dozen groups in southern Yemen announced the creation of the Southern National Council (SNC). A statement from the SNC said it aimed to act as a countervailing force to the STC, to support the internationally recognized Yemeni government and Saudi-led coalition, and to establish a federal system in Yemen, among other objectives. While maintaining a social media presence, the SNC's actual numbers and influence on the ground appeared scant as of the end of May.
- **May 3:** Qatar's National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) condemned the arrest of a Qatari national in Yemen on April 21. The NHRC said Mohsen Saleh Sa'adun al-Karbi was in the country visiting relatives and is being held by

Saudi-led coalition forces without charge. Yemeni officials say they detained a Qatari national on the border with Oman on suspicion of providing intelligence to the Houthis. A number of diplomats and Yemeni stakeholders have told the Sana'a Center that Qatar has recently sought to increase its influence in Mahrah governorate, bordering Oman, via local leaders, as well as humanitarian aid, in order to compete with Omani and Emirati clout in the area.

- **May 21:** Yemen's Interior Minister Ahmed al-Maysari told the US Public Broadcasting Service that Yemeni government officials could not leave Aden without permission from the UAE. He added that there were "indicators to support" the claim that Yemen was under occupation. By the end of the month, however, al-Maysari had visited the UAE as part of what appeared to be a Saudi attempt to mediate between the Yemeni government and Abu Dhabi.
- **May 25:** Five MPs from the General People's Congress (GPC) party, including deputy speaker Naser Bajeil, fled Sana'a for Aden.
- **May 27:** Following the arrest in Aden of Walid al-Idrisi, a Southern Resistance militia commander, protests erupted in the city's al-Mansura district. A local source with knowledge of the events told the Sana'a Center that al-Idrisi's arrest came after clashes in the Martyr's Square area of al-Mansura between Southern Resistance fighters, many of whom are critical of the UAE's role in Yemen, and the UAE-backed Hizam al-Amni, or Security Belt forces. Al-Idrisi was released the following day after having apologized to the UAE in a video that had been widely shared online.
- **May 28:** A meeting in Abu Dhabi was staged amongst some of Yemen's most prominent southern leaders. These included former Vice President and former Prime Minister Khaled Bahah, former President of South Yemen Ali Salem Al-Baidh, former President and former Prime Minister of South Yemen Ali Nasser Mohammed, and former Prime Minister of South Yemen and first post-unification Prime Minister Haidar Abubakr al-Attas.
- **May 31:** President Hadi met Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdul Aziz for the first time in more than a year.

## Military and Security Developments

### *Coalition-Backed Forces Advancing on Hudaydah Port*

Through May, coalition-backed forces advancing north from southern Hudaydah governorate made significant progress along the coastal road, repeatedly forcing Houthi fighters to relinquish territory. When speaking with the Sana'a Center last month, Tariq Saleh, the nephew of late former President Ali Abdullah Saleh and current commander of the UAE-backed National Resistance Forces fighting in the governorate, confirmed that the near-term goal of the offensive is to route Houthi forces from Hudaydah city.



A prospective coalition-backed campaign against Hudaydah city in the spring of 2017 had been derailed due to a lack of US support and international outcry over the likelihood of massive humanitarian fallout from such a campaign. Given that Hudaydah port and nearby Saleef port are currently the entry points for more than 70 percent of the country's basic commodities, any interruption in imports there could potentially launch millions of Yemenis, already on the verge of famine, into starvation. Western officials, speaking to the Sana'a Center last month, said Washington and London had given the green light for the current coalition-backed offensive to take Hudaydah city, but with the caveat that the ports were not to be attacked.

The UAE is providing air cover and coordinating the current offensive amongst an assortment of disparate anti-Houthi forces, including al-Amaliqa (Giants Brigades), local Tihama Resistance groups, and Tariq Saleh's National Resistance Forces. There are two southern approaches to Hudaydah city: one running along the coastline and a second that is several dozen kilometers inland that runs through various populated areas. The coalition-backed offensive has made progress along the coastal route, where Houthi forces have generally withdrawing while planting landmines and improvised explosive devices in their wake to slow the coalition-backed advance – a strategy condemned by human rights groups for its impact of civilians (see below 'IDPs Face Violations of International Humanitarian Law'). Progress on the inland road had yet to see similar gains as May ended, with anti-Houthi forces yet to enter Zabid, the historic town and World Heritage Site roughly 100 km south of Hudaydah. The Sana'a Center has heard the assessment of military analysts who assert that a successful assault on Hudaydah city will likely require anti-Houthi forces to secure both southern approaches.

### ***Anti-Houthi Forces Make Gains in Taiz***

During mid-May, anti-Houthi forces cleared territory in the Mawza and al-Wazi'iyah districts and the Khaboub mountains, establishing their hold over southwest Taiz governorate and cutting off access to the neighboring Lahij governorate to the east. Tariq Saleh's National Resistance Forces and the southern Giants Brigade also took control of al-Amri military camp, in Dhubab district, Taiz governorate. The military installation is the second-largest on Yemen's west coast, strategically placed at the crossroads of key land and sea supply routes and used as a base to supervise shipping through the Bab al-Mandeb Strait.

### ***US Special Forces and Military Drones Active in Anti-Houthi Operations***

On May 3, the New York Times reported that US special forces personnel had been covertly deployed along the Saudi-Yemeni border to assist the Saudi military in locating and destroying Houthi missiles and launch sites. The troops, composed of "about a dozen Green Berets" were reportedly deployed in December 2017, following a Houthi ballistic missile attack on Riyadh's King Khalid International Airport the month before (for more see 'Yemen at the UN – November 2017 Review').



A high level Yemeni government figure, speaking to the Sana'a Center last month, said that the US military had also deployed drones in Yemen in support of Yemeni government ground combat operations against Houthi forces.

The US Department of Defense (DoD) previously maintained that direct US military actions in Yemen were focused exclusively on counterterrorism operations against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and that the US was not engaged in direct operations against the Houthis. The DoD had also said US troops in Saudi Arabia were focused on border defense, and support for the Saudi-led military coalition was limited to intelligence sharing, aircraft refuelling and logistical support. As recently as April 17, Robert S. Kareem, assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, informed the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that 50 US troops were in Saudi Arabia "largely helping on the ballistic missile threat." The New York Times report noted that the city of Najran, in southern Saudi Arabia, is a hub for these US efforts.

### ***Prisoner Exchange Slate for Eid***

High-level sources in both the Yemeni government and the Houthi leadership confirmed to the Sana'a Center that negotiations were underway in May for a large-scale prisoner exchange between the two sides. The exchange is expected to take place mid-June with the end of Ramadan.

### ***Other Military and Security Developments in Brief***

- **May 4:** Sudan reaffirmed its commitment to coalition operations in Yemen until "legitimacy is restored." On May 2, Minister of Defense Ali Salem had said Sudan was reconsidering its involvement in the conflict following demands from Sudanese parliamentarians that their troops be brought home.
- **May 8:** Government forces claimed to have driven out Houthis forces from the district of Kitad wa al-Booqe'e district in eastern Sa'ada governorate.
- **May 10:** A Turkish vessel transporting a 50,000 tonne cargo of wheat was hit by rocket off the Red Sea town of Salif, Hudaydah governorate. Major Tom Mobbs, the head of intelligence and security with the European Union's counter-piracy mission EU Navfor, said the attack likely came from a non-state actor using land-based missiles or rockets. Saudi-backed coalition spokesman Colonel Turki al-Malki accused the Houthi movement of carrying out the attack.
- **May 13:** The coalition-backed Giants Brigade and National Resistance Forces took control of Hima harbor in al-Tuhayta district, along Hudaydah governorate's Red Sea coast. On May 22, a roadside bomb killed three civilians near the port; Houthi forces are thought to have planted the IEDs prior to their retreat from the area.
- **May 20:** Supported by coalition airpower, pro-government forces took al-Nar mountain range in Hajjah governorate. Fighting continued over Harad district, a strategic area connecting Sa'ada and Hajjah governorates.

- **May 23:** The Emirates News Agency reported that the UAE Armed Forces had destroyed two boats belonging to Houthi forces, claiming they “were threatening one of the commercial oil tankers in the Red Sea.”
- **May 25:** The head of operations for the 3rd Giants Brigade battalion, Maj. Gen. Abdullah Saeed Zghaina, was killed during an anti-Houthi offensive that aimed to secure the Zabid junction some 90 kilometers southeast of Hudaydah city. The same day, coalition-backed forces announced that they had taken control of the al-Faza area in al-Tuhayta district and secured a strategic road linking Zabid and al-Tuhayta districts in Hudaydah governorate.
- **May 31:** UAE-backed Security Belt forces announced that they had seized control of al-Dhaleh city after clashes with Southern Resistance forces. Both armed groups are members of the anti-Houthi coalition. Notably, al-Dhaleh is considered a stronghold of the Southern Movement, to which Southern Resistance forces are linked.

## Economic Developments

### *Fuel Crisis in Aden*

On May 9, a severe shortage of petrol and diesel fuels gripped Aden. Official fuel stations, which had a government regulated retail price ceiling of YR 6,300 per 20 liters of petrol, essentially closed en masse, with the same amount of fuel continuing to sell on the parallel black market for upwards of YR 8,000.

In March this year, President Hadi had ordered the liberalization of fuel imports in what the government said was an attempt to try and address widespread fuel shortages. At the time the Sana’a Center economists predicted the move would cause downward pressure on the value of the domestic currency and in turn increase fuel prices (for details see ‘Yemen at the UN – March 2018 Review’). Just prior to Hadi’s announcement in March, the official retail price cap for 20 litres of petrol had been YR 3,700.

The shortage last month lasted three days, ending when the authorities intervened to stabilize prices and reopen the official fuel stations. As of the end of May, however, it was unclear what the primary factors were behind the fuel shortage. Sana’a Center economists posit that it is likely that fuel station owners, tracking both global market prices and domestic currency depreciation in Yemen, anticipated fuel price increases. Looking to take advantage of the situation they acted as a cartel by announcing the fuel shortage, ceased selling their fuel to the public and instead sold it to the black market.

Notably, the governors of Marib and Hadramawt – both allies of the Yemeni government – did not liberalize fuel imports in their areas when President Hadi issued his March decree. At the end of May, 20 liters of petrol in Marib was selling for YR 3,500 at official retailers, and in Hadramawt for YR 5,800.

## ***CBY Governor Continues Push to Revive CBY Functions***

On May 16, Mohammed Zammam visited Aden for the second time since his appointment as Governor of the Central Bank of Yemen (CBY) to hold meetings with the CBY management, Yemeni banks, exchange companies, private sector actors, and government agencies to discuss the bank's monetary policy. According to Aden-based banking sector sources, the meetings built on CBY policy interventions announced last month. Discussions focused on the conditions attached to the US\$2 billion Saudi deposit made available to the CBY in April, and set up an implementation framework for effective utilization of these funds. The funds have already been partly allocated to support imports of five staple goods – wheat, rice, sugar, milk and edible oil – set to start at the beginning of June. In addition, the governor announced that from June 1, public servants would be paid through commercial banks, in an attempt to ease the banks' liquidity crisis and restore trust in the banking sector.

There were also discussions around fostering greater coordination and cooperation on fiscal and monetary policy between the Ministry of Finance, customs and taxes authorities and the central bank. This is to ensure tighter control over the collection of government dues and public spending and to restore accounts held outside the CBY. A source working in the Aden banking sector said that in the past three months the CBY has recouped some US\$400 million in oil revenues from al-Massila block in Hadramawt that had been transferred to accounts outside the CBY.

## ***High-Level Banking Sector Meeting in Sana'a***

On May 25, the Sana'a Center organized a private focus group meeting at the Yemen Banks Association in Sana'a with the heads of the country's 13 largest banks. Discussions highlighted the most crucial challenges facing the banking sector, both systemic – such as the complications arising from operating in a country where two central banks are issuing divergent policies – and immediate – such as liquidity crisis brought on by the increased demand for hard currency during Ramadan. Further discussions focused on the Houthi-controlled authorities refusal to allow the banks to accept the new large-denomination Yemeni rial banknotes, printed in Russia, which the Yemeni government has been issuing from Aden. The bankers noted that Houthi security forces had arrested colleagues for accepting these new banknotes.

## ***Economic Updates From Houthi-Controlled Areas***

On May 10, Mahdi al-Mashat, the President of the Supreme Political Council – the governing body in Houthi-controlled areas – ordered the Sana'a-based CBY to seize the financial assets of late former President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

On May 19, the Houthi authorities also imposed new fees on private sector electricity providers, with the latter expected to pass on the increased costs to consumers.

## Humanitarian Developments

### *Cholera Vaccination Campaign*

The World Health Organization (WHO) announced the first-ever oral cholera vaccination campaign in Yemen was launched between May 6 and 15. While the WHO continues to state that Yemen is experiencing the largest cholera outbreak in the world, the number of new cases has largely stabilized through the past several months. Fears of a renewed outbreak have increased recently, however, with the onset of Yemen's rainy season, which runs from mid-April to the end of August.

On May 3, a scientific analysis of the cholera outbreak to date found that it was likely for there to be an upsurge in new cases during the current rainy season. The research project, funded by Yemeni health authorities, the WHO and Doctors Without Borders, analyzed surveillance data on the two cholera outbreaks of late September 2016 and late April 2017. It concluded that "the small first cholera epidemic wave seeded cholera across Yemen during the dry season. When the rains returned in April, 2017, they triggered widespread cholera transmission that led to the large second wave. These results suggest that cholera could resurge during the ongoing 2018 rainy season if transmission remains active."

In this context, this month's vaccination campaign was implemented by the WHO, the UN Children's Fund and Yemen's national health authorities as part of their integrated cholera response plan, which targeted almost half a million people in five Aden districts. The WHO said it was still negotiating countrywide approval to implement the campaign in other governorates, targeting at least 4 million people. According to aid workers, Houthi officials' refusal has delayed the implementation of vaccination campaigns for almost a year.

### *Two Cyclones Flood Socotra*

In the second half of May, two cyclones crossed the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden, reaching coastal areas in Yemen, Oman, and the Horn of Africa. The first, Cyclone Sagar, mostly affected the Horn of Africa, though it also caused heavy rains and flash floods in southern Yemen, increasing its vulnerability to the second cyclone that followed less than a week later. On May 22, a tropical storm in the southwest Arabian Sea intensified into what became known as Cyclone Mekunu, reaching Socotra a little more than 24 hours later. The government declared a state of emergency on May 24 and called upon the Saudi-led military coalition to immediately provide humanitarian assistance. After hitting Socotra, Cyclone Mekunu made landfall along the Oman-Yemen coastline, passing through Mahrah governorate on May 26.

By May 27, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies had documented that more than 500 families from the towns of Hadibu and Qalansiyah had been evacuated to public buildings. On May 26, the Emirati News Agency reported that a first Emirati relief plane had delivered 40 tonnes of humanitarian aid to Socotra. As of May 30, Saudi Arabia had also delivered four relief planes of aid. The

following day, Riyadh announced the opening of the first Socotra office for the Saudi Reconstruction Program in Yemen. UN agencies were also scheduled to send three rotations of emergency supplies within the week between May 28 and June 3.

By the end of the month, OCHA concluded that the cyclone's impact on Socotra and Yemen's eastern coastline had been "less severe than originally feared." Nevertheless, 20 people were counted as dead in Socotra, including missing persons that could not be found, according to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Food stocks have been largely destroyed, property and infrastructure badly damaged, and water wells and water networks in the towns of Hadibu and Qalansiyah partly damaged, with only one water well known to be functional in Hadibu.

On May 26, Socotra's air and sea ports resumed functioning, but access to the island's eastern and southern villages remained largely restricted. Concerns remained over the situation of the 2,500 families living on Abd al-Quri and Samhah islands, with whom no contact had been made since the cyclone had passed the Socotra archipelago. Livelihoods in Socotra are also expected to be heavily affected, given the high percentage of fishermen and farmers on Socotra; some 120 fishing boats are thought to have been lost in the cyclone.

In al-Mahrah governorate, 20 people were reportedly injured and four dead. Buildings, vehicles, power lines and generators were destroyed, agricultural equipment and warehouses in al-Gaydah city damaged, and roads between Hadramawt and al-Mahrah partly damaged or blocked. As of May 30, some 2,000 people had been isolated in Alabiri city for three consecutive days due to flood water.

### ***UN Humanitarian Coordinator Urges Government to Boost Imports***

On May 24, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock issued a statement on the situation in Yemen, expressing deep concern about the recent escalation of hostilities, increasing restrictions on humanitarian activities, and decreasing commercial imports. He noted that "[s]ome 8.4 million people are severely food insecure and at risk of starvation. If conditions do not improve, a further 10 million people will fall into this category by the end of the year."

Lowcock raised particular concern over the recent decline in commercial food imports through Yemen's Red Sea ports. While commending recent discussions and agreements to accelerate the processing of vessels, Lowcock called on the Yemeni government, "with the support of the Coalition, to take active steps to boost commercial imports of food, fuel and humanitarian supplies through all Yemen's ports." Lowcock reported that restrictions on humanitarian action in Yemen continued, including the detention of humanitarian staff and the delay or denial of visas for them in northern areas.



*Other Humanitarian Developments in Brief*

- **May 7:** The WHO reported that it had delivered more than 7 tonnes of anti-cancer medicines and chemotherapy medications to the National Oncology Center in Sana'a, which would "cover the acute shortages of medicines for cancer patients for one year." The WHO also announced that another shipment would follow within the first half of this year, noting that "noncommunicable diseases represented 39 percent of the main causes of death" in Yemen and that currently, only 20 percent of the country's health facilities provided respective treatment.
- **May 7:** The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that, given the ongoing clashes in and around Taiz city, another 22,000 families could soon be displaced. On May 28, OCHA added that another 140,000 people in Zabid, al-Garrahi and al-Tuhayta districts in southern Hudaydah governorate were at risk of being displaced. Another 200,000 people would face displacement if fighting on the ground reached al-Hudaydah city, according to OCHA. So far, more than 130,000 Yemenis have been displaced along the Red Sea coast and in Taiz since hostilities escalated in December 2017.
- **May 8:** After his visit to Yemen in early May, the Director of Operations and Emergencies at the UN Migration Agency (IOM) Mohammed Abdiker described the situation of migrants in Yemen as "appalling and inhumane." He then called for "greater support and protection both from the international community and authorities in-country." According to IOM, nearly 100,000 migrants have entered Yemen in 2017, with the large majority coming from the Horn of Africa. The IOM and the UN Refugee Agency facilitated the voluntary return of some 2,900 migrants and refugees in 2017 and more than 1,300 as of the end of May this year.
- **May 12:** IOM reported that a national measles vaccination campaign had been conducted in Shabwah and Abyan governorates in the preceding week.
- **May 16:** The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre released its 2018 Global Report on Internal Displacement. According to the report, 2017 had seen 160,000 new displacements in 21 out of 22 Yemeni governorates, with "the overwhelming majority" of displacements occurring in the governorates of Taiz, Hajjah, Amanat al-Asimah (Sana'a city), and Amran. The report notes that this "relatively small figure... masks much larger fluctuations and dynamics in which families flee and return as violence flares and subsides." Forty-four percent of internally displaced persons (IDPs) remained within their governorates of origin. Most IDPs also live in private dwellings, which the report attributes a "national policy on IDPs [that] allows for the establishment of displacement camps only as a last resort." Women and children constituted 75 percent of IDPs while being at greater risk of abuses such as gender-based violence.
- **May 20:** The WHO reported that Yemen had seen more than 1.1 million suspected cholera cases, including 2,291 associated deaths, since the outbreak of cholera in April 2017. According to a WHO Weekly Epidemiological Bulletin for May 7 to 13, "[t]he total proportion of severe cases among the suspected cases is 15.3 percent." Out of Yemen's 305 affected districts, almost half had reported no new suspected cases during the three preceding weeks.



- **May 26:** For the first time since November 2017, a containerized cargo vessel was granted access to al-Hudaydah port.
- **May 28:** OCHA reported that US\$1.46 billion out of the UN's US\$2.96 billion 2018 Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan (YHRP) had been funded, equaling 49.3 percent of the requested amount. Some US\$550 million pledged to the YHRP at the Geneva High-Level Pledging Event in early April remained unfulfilled. Notably, various countries have donated some US\$422 million outside the framework of the YHRP.
- **May 28:** The UN Children's Fund concluded implementing a second round of World Bank-funded emergency cash transfers for the most vulnerable in Yemen. In total, nearly 1.5 million families have been reached by the project, which had been launched in mid-2017 (for more see 'Yemen at the UN – August 2017 Review'). A third round of cash transfers is planned for August this year.

## Human Rights and War Crimes Developments

### *Coalition Bombs Presidential Office in Sana'a*

On May 7, Saudi-led military coalition airstrikes targeted the Houthi-run Presidential Office building in Sana'a, located in a densely populated area with several schools nearby. According to Sana'a Center sources, the office was occupied by a full staff of civilian personnel at the time. At least six people were killed and 30 injured.

Senior Houthi leader and head of the Supreme Revolutionary Committee Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, was reportedly in the building's basement at the time of the strikes. He was unharmed in the incident.

### *IDPs Face Violations of International Humanitarian Law*

On May 17, Amnesty International released a report on violations of international humanitarian law that belligerent parties in Yemen have committed against IDPs fleeing the frontlines along the Red Sea coast. According to the report, Houthi forces have put civilians' lives at risk by conducting indiscriminate attacks on populated areas, notably through the use of imprecise weapons such as mortars, and stationing fighters and military vehicles in residential areas.

Amnesty noted that Houthi forces "have also allegedly mined roads and have otherwise prevented civilians from leaving; in other cases they have expelled people from their homes in areas recently taken from government control." Amnesty International further reported that Houthi forces had forcibly recruited male civilians, including minors. The report also said that Saudi-led military coalition airstrikes had killed and injured civilians.

## ***Government Seeks Answers From UAE Regarding the Fate of Detainees***

On May 2, the southern Yemen news outlet Aden al-Ghad reported that the Hadi government had sent a formal letter to the UAE asking for information on the fate of 12 detainees arrested in Aden. This came about following the mothers of the detainees staging public protests. Local Sana'a Center sources confirmed that the letter had been sent, signed by the Interior Minister Ahmed bin Ahmed al-Maysari, who also asked the UAE to refer the detainees to the Public Prosecutor's Office.

Al-Maysari also sent a letter to the Director of Aden Security General Shalal Shaya, demanding the transfer of the detainees and their files to the general attorney. According to Aden al-Ghad, this was the first time that the government had addressed the UAE regarding the issue of detainees in Aden.

Last year, Human Rights Watch and the Associated Press had both published investigative reports revealing the use of secret detention facilities, torture and forced disappearances by UAE-backed forces in Aden and Hadramawt governorates (for more see 'Yemen at the UN – June 2017 Review').

## ***Other Human Rights and War Crimes Developments in Brief***

- **May 10:** The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack released its 2018 Education Under Attack report, covering the five-year period between 2013 and 2017. The report points out that the “largest number of educational institutions damaged, destroyed, or used for military purposes was documented in Yemen, where more than 1,500 schools and universities were affected by attacks on education or military use, according to UN and media sources. Many of these attacks were the result of air strikes by the Saudi-led coalition or bombings by non-state Houthi armed groups.” Notably, the Yemeni government endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, a global inter-governmental commitment, in October 2017 (for more see 'Yemen at the UN – October 2017 Review').
- **May 14:** The UN Secretary-General submitted his annual report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict in 2017. Regarding Yemen, the report notes that actions against civilians included “deliberate and indiscriminate attacks,” “the use of cluster munitions,” attacks on places of worship, bureaucratic impediments on humanitarian access, attacks against aid workers, and “the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.”
- **May 15:** The Yemeni human rights NGO Mwatana released its annual report on violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. Its list of “the most prominent patterns of human rights violations in 2017” includes starvation as a means of warfare, denial of humanitarian access, as well as indiscriminate airstrikes and ground attacks.
- **May 22:** A Houthi missile struck one of the most densely populated areas of Marib city shortly after the iftar evening meal, killing five civilians and injuring at least 20, according to officials.

### ***Acknowledgments***

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This report was developed in partnership with Friedrich-Ebert Yemen office.

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